

CHAPTER 1



Introduction

French Society in 1789

Historians working on the French Revolution have a problem. All of our attempts to find an explanation in terms of social groups or classes, or particular segments of society becoming powerfully activated, have fallen short. As one expert aptly expressed it: “the truth is we have no agreed general theory of why the French Revolution came about and what it was—and no prospect of one.”¹ This gaping, causal void is certainly not due to lack of investigation into the Revolution’s background and origins. If class conflict in the Marxist sense has been jettisoned, other ways of attributing the Revolution to social change have been explored with unrelenting rigor. Of course, every historian agrees society was slowly changing and that along with the steady expansion of trade and the cities, and the apparatus of the state and armed forces, more (and more professional) lawyers, engineers, administrators, officers, medical staff, architects, and naval personnel were increasingly infusing and diversifying the existing order.² Yet, no major, new socioeconomic pressures of a kind apt to cause sudden, dramatic change have been identified. The result, even some keen revisionists admit, is a “somewhat painful void.”³

Most historians today claim there was not one big cause but instead numerous small contributory impulses. One historian, stressing the absence of any identifiable overriding cause, likened the Revolution’s origins to a “multi-coloured tapestry of interwoven causal factors.”⁴ Social and economic historians embracing the “new social interpretation” identify a variety of difficulties that might have rendered eighteenth-century French society, at least in some respects, more fraught and vulnerable than earlier. Yet these factors, all marginal when taken individually, hardly suffice to fill the explanatory gap left by the collapse of every general argument, such as the Marxist thesis of class struggle or the once widely held view that impoverishment and falling real wages

created a severe subsistence crisis with deteriorating living standards for most. The latter contention, if correct, would assuredly provide a concrete, compelling argumentation, a comprehensive explanation of why a generalized revolt occurred and possibly why so many major changes were subsequently introduced. There would be a clear logic to accepting that the Revolution was a response to misery and deprivation caused by receding living standards. But the evidence shows that no such crisis occurred. Per capita income in France actually grew over the eighteenth century as towns expanded, along with commerce and industry, shipping, and overseas trade. Agriculture prospered. What then moved the French urban affluent, and the urban poor and peasants, usually considered the main active agents of the Revolution?

“The Revolution,” affirms our present academic consensus, “had many origins.”⁵ Losing all prospect of a compelling narrative in terms of social groups and mechanisms, social and economic historians have in recent years focused on the unbalanced character of the general expansion. France’s population grew from around twenty-one to twenty-eight million between 1700 and 1800, an increase of roughly one-third. But the accompanying growth in activity and prosperity in the towns outstripped that in the countryside, where 80 percent of the population dwelled. Consequently, agricultural output only just, and only erratically, kept pace. Narrow surpluses in some years alternated with mild or severe shortages in others. Lack of food and intermittent price surges were, of course, nothing new, but they were undoubtedly relevant to shaping the Revolution at crucial moments.⁶

As elsewhere in Europe, the main French cities grew impressively during the eighteenth century, expanding by between a third and a half, with Bordeaux more than doubling to 111,000. Paris swelled by a third, reaching around 650,000.⁷ Small towns often increased by more than half. Until 1789, the crafts flourished, especially those producing luxury goods for the wealthy and for export. Real wages rose overall. Nevertheless, most townsfolk remained poor and unskilled and, for many laborers and artisans, combined demographic pressure and uneven economic growth caused real wages to fluctuate during the 1770s and 1780s, with a downward tendency affecting some by perhaps around 10 or 12 percent. Expansion, as frequently happens, occasioned fresh collisions of interest with certain groups losing ground.⁸ Some resentment may have been caused by the tax burden on the slowly expanding agricultural sector, taxes on land and food output growing somewhat as a proportion of the whole. The burden on the commerce and crafts generating most

of France's growth correspondingly fell slightly. But the imbalance was marginal and developed against a background of prior heavy fiscal over-emphasis on trade and towns so that this change could be viewed more as a corrective than a tangible grievance.⁹ If agricultural output represented around two-thirds of the French economy in 1788, land and agriculture still accounted for only 56 percent of royal revenues.

What the “new social interpretation” plainly demonstrates is that there was no major crisis troubling late eighteenth-century French society of the kind apt to generate serious destabilizing discontent across society. Certainly, there was extensive poverty and misery but within an entirely familiar and traditional format. There was a growing affluent urban bourgeoisie, slowly expanding in size, wealth, and ambition, that entered into increasing competition with the privileged elites for government posts, prerogatives, and honors, but both the nobility and these upwardly mobile strands of the bourgeoisie remained politically, socially, culturally, religiously, and, in general outlook, intensely conservative.¹⁰ For the rest, the “new social interpretation” yields only a few relatively minor tensions affecting particular groups. The economic gap between aristocratic bishops and parish curates widened. With the general economic expansion, demand for and ability to pay for ennoblement, dignities, and high office outstripped the rise in prosperity, causing the fortunes of poorer noble families to deteriorate relative to recently ennobled newcomers and possibly a degree of frustration and resentment among the uppermost strata of the mercantile and professional classes, although this is hard to document. In any case, the overall impact of such factors on the Revolution cannot have been great.¹¹

The nobility, broadly defined, had long comprised five or six distinct elite strata all continually jostling for power, influence, and advantage. There were the court and higher military nobility, recently ennobled wealthy bourgeois (the *annoblis*), municipal oligarchies, the episcopate, the often quite poor rural gentry, and the noblesse de robe, or urban judicial aristocracy staffing the country's regional high courts (*parlements*). But none of these fissures presented anything at all new. Claiming “multiple, overlapping origins of the French Revolution” may initially sound promising but proves inadequate when all the factors identified are too long-standing, slow-moving, marginal, and insufficiently specific to apply convincingly to the actual political clashes, crises, and debates driving the Revolution. In any case, how economic and other material factors could directly cause such a dramatic shift, as the

Revolution rapidly entailed, to democracy, freedom of thought, expression, and the press, human rights, secularism, sexual liberation, gender and racial emancipation, individual liberty, and equality before the law, no one can really say. “The prime defect of the revisionist accounts,” as one historian relevantly remarked, “has been their failure to offer a plausible alternative to the Marxist version.”¹²

At most, the “new social explanation” authorizes us to claim that “what pushed the Revolution forward was the willingness of disenfranchised robe nobles, alienated parish priests, and ambitious professionals to challenge the old order.”¹³ But such an explanation, even if possessing a considerable background validity as it does, cannot easily be applied to the revolutionary process itself since none of these groups figured prominently among the revolutionary leadership. By and large, as we shall see, the principal organizers, spokesmen, and publicists of the factions that forged the great changes of the Revolution in legislation, institutions, and practices prior to Robespierre’s coup d'état in June 1793 were not robe nobles, parish priests, or ambitious professionals. There was never a greater or more rapid transformation in the shape, values, and politics of any society. We can only know for sure that a given factor directly contributed to this vast vortex of change when the evidence of the primary sources proves particular grievances or tensions motivated, inspired, or induced key groups or individuals to initiate the actual transformation of institutions, laws, and culture constituting the Revolution.

Only one major, tangible, material factor directly linked causally to the revolutionary foreground can be pointed to: the royal financial crisis of 1787–89. In terms of timing, the political revolution unquestionably began with the French Crown’s chronic financial difficulties of the mid- and later 1780s and the ensuing attempts at fiscal reform. In 1787, faced by overwhelming deficits made worse by feverish speculation in French government bonds on the international market, Louis XVI was forced into political moves that eventually triggered the revolutionary process. From the Crown’s (and soon also the aristocracy’s) standpoint, matters spun out of control under the energetic reforming minister Charles-Alexandre de Calonne (1734–1802), a high official and robe noble of the *parlement* of Douai, who by trying to tackle the deficits destabilized first the monarchy and then the country. “O my dear Calonne!” mocked one of the most republican-minded of the young revolutionaries of the years 1788–89, Camille Desmoulins, later Danton’s

right-hand man.¹⁴ But even fully allowing for the gravity of the financial crisis and Calonne's errors, neither the subsequent breakdown of government nor, still less, the vast revolutionary process that followed are really explained by it.

How and why Calonne's abortive reform program, designed to remodel the *ancien régime* monarchy on the basis of new taxes, including a universal land tax, while fully accommodating the existing elites, turned into a broad-based campaign to emasculate the Crown, suppress all the country's pre-1789 institutions and obliterate nobility, clergy, and the noblesse de robe (judicial aristocracy), has never been adequately explained, and cannot be in terms of financial factors or the wider economic context. About this there is a remarkable consensus. Even those stressing the financial crisis most concur that in itself the king's financial predicament does little to dispel what some historians, in evident frustration, have called the "mystery" of the Revolution's origins and subsequent course.¹⁵ "Why did an apparently traditional fiscal crisis engender the massive transformation of an entire social order?"¹⁶

Today scholars abandoning economic interest—class, class struggle, and economically defined social groups—as the key to unraveling the Revolution often seek a more sociocultural form of explanation, basing their interpretation on changes in cultural context, identifying elaborate networks and changing patterns of human relationships, and especially examining "fields of discourse," along with their attached ceremonies and symbols. This intense preoccupation with "discourse" has proved extremely valuable in providing background, and assumes several forms. One useful approach invokes "an enlarged and renovated public sphere of sociability and debate" that created a wider arena of action for "professionals."¹⁷ This line of investigation builds on what we know of the expansion of elites in pre-1789 France and locates the Revolution's chief motor in a mix of lawyers, medical men, and other professionals closely tied through their occupations to the urban market and other social groups. There was, undeniably, a strikingly high proportion of lawyers, more than three hundred in the National Assembly in 1789 and subsequently.

But however helpful such research is, it does no more than enrich the background: there is little sign lawyers played a particularly significant role in forging the democratic Revolution prior to Robespierre's takeover. Rather, as one would perhaps expect, lawyers and other professionals mostly preferred to stick to existing norms and were conspicuously absent among the orators, publicists, editors, and political

leaders dominating the committees and shaping revolutionary legislation before 1793. If focusing on “professionals” tells us little about the main actors in the Revolution, even more unhelpful is focusing on the attitudes of entrepreneurs and men of business. In the capital, as in the great ports—Bordeaux, Nantes, Marseilles, and Saint-Malo—merchants and bankers mostly avoided involvement with the Revolution, remaining as politically neutral as possible. Thus, a wide variety of different social groups subscribed to pro-Revolution newspapers from 1789, but the subscription lists show that the proportion of their regular readership consisting of businessmen was strikingly low compared to other groups, virtually negligible.¹⁸

Admittedly, for historians subscribing to a brand of “revisionism,” popular in the 1980s and 1990s, our apparent inability to find a “major cause” scarcely matters. Perhaps great new developments in history do not have “big” causes. Some argue that the English Revolution of the seventeenth century demonstrates that great changes can follow from relatively small and insignificant causes. Arguably, the true interpretation of the French Revolution is precisely that there is no overarching, grand interpretation, a suggestion that strongly appeals to some philosophers as well as historians.¹⁹ But the French Revolution was a rupture with the past so complete and dramatic, the scale of the departure from *ancien régime* society, culture, and politics so total and far-reaching, the transformation so foundational for subsequent Western and eventually also non-Western developments in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, that arguing there was no major social structural cause—only a tableau of, in themselves, relatively minor ones—is not just unconvincing, it is not even remotely plausible.

The reconstitution of the legal, religious, educational, cultural, and political foundations of French society, along with the general emancipation of all minorities and the abolition of slavery, were interlinked, simultaneous, and comprehensive. The Revolution denied the validity of ideas, customs, institutions, or laws inherited from the past absolutely and totally. Furthermore, this undeviating repudiation and discrediting of all previously accepted values, moral codes, laws, and practices transpired with astounding speed between 1788 and 1793, despite being opposed or uncomprehendingly regarded by most of the population and even most of the National Assembly. Indeed, the transformation occurred despite a lack of popular support for many key changes, such as giving equal rights to Protestants, civil divorce, suppressing the old regional high courts or parlements, emancipation of the Jews, ending

the slave trade, and abolishing the old provinces—Brittany, Normandy, Provence, Alsace, and Languedoc—with their separate identities and privileges.

A reexamination of the actual leadership of the Revolution seems called for as a way to build on the emerging sociocultural approach, and, especially, more effectively integrate social history with intellectual history. This present study attempts to establish new empirical findings by quarrying the main primary sources, above all, the amazingly detailed record of the debates in the successive French national assemblies that spoke for the Revolution, the corpus known as the *Archives Parlementaires*. Consulted together with other key records of decisions and debates, such as the discussions in the Paris city government and records of the meetings of the Jacobin Club, much of it verbatim, the debates in the legislature provide a solid basis for reconsideration. Additional light emerges from the extraordinarily rich contemporary newspaper coverage for the years down to 1793, and then again from 1795 to 1800. All this material takes on a new significance once the socioeconomic assumptions that steered research for so long are set aside, and the sociocultural approach is combined with the lessons of intellectual history.

The Revolution's preoccupation with laying down fundamental new guidelines not only helps define its significance but also delimits its beginning and end. The Revolution was above all a process of emancipation, democratization, and fundamental renewal on the basis of human rights—ruthlessly interrupted in 1793–94 and progressively aborted in 1799–1804. The epoch-making egalitarian, libertarian, and democratic ideals of 1789 were rendered moribund, at least in terms of immediately foreseeable possibilities, politics, and international relations, when the Life Consulate, embodied in the Constitution of the Year X, assigned unlimited dictatorial powers to Napoleon on 3 August 1802. This finally terminated the tumultuous search for fundamental new criteria and categories that had previously gripped France for fourteen years. Breaking with the Revolution, Napoleon first imposed a qualified amnesty allowing émigré nobles living outside France to return and, in April 1802, a comprehensive amnesty, permitting all but members of the royal family and the most committed counterrevolutionaries to reintegrate.

Freedom of the press and expression, even if sorely dented between 1789 and 1799 at times, was not finally suppressed until 1799–1800. Until 1799, press freedom always remained an intensely live issue and

immediate possibility, and much of the time it was a reality. The universal principle of equality embraced in competing ways by all ruling factions between 1789 and 1799 was only finally discarded as the basis of citizenship and men's rights with the new Constitution of 1799. This also discarded the Declaration of the Rights of Man, which in successive formulations had been fundamental to the Revolution throughout the momentous years from 1789 to 1799. Linked to this, black slavery, abolished by the Revolution in principle in 1794, was reintroduced by Napoleon in 1802. The Napoleonic regime fell back on a quasi-hierarchical vision of society, fostering a new ruling elite comprised of a mix of recently elevated notables and rehabilitated old nobles. Likewise, from 1802, most revolutionary innovations in marriage and family law were canceled. Under the new civil code of 1804, woman's legal subordination to her husband within marriage and subordination to paternal authority before marriage were reaffirmed. The 1804 code replaced the Revolution's incipient gender equality with an openly discriminatory double standard for processing adultery suits, applications for divorce, and property rights.²⁰ However, the circumstances driving these setbacks to basic human rights—the postrevolutionary regime's unrelenting authoritarianism, Napoleon's overweening personal authority, and rejection of the legislature's supremacy over the executive and the judicial arm—all commenced with the new Constitution of 1799. Effectively, this marked the end of the Revolution.

That the Revolution ended with Napoleon's rise to dictatorial power is also reflected by developments in religion. Before 1788, church and state in France, as everywhere in Europe, were closely intertwined. During the Revolution this pattern was fundamentally transformed in stages. Stripped of all political and legislative authority, the Church also suffered expropriation of its lands and revenues by the state. A comprehensive religious toleration prevailed (except under the Terror during 1793–94) and Catholicism was no longer the authorized, public church. The state as such, and in intention also public education, became essentially secular. However, this bitter struggle between revolution and religious authority ceased after 1800, and at Easter 1802 Napoleon, as First Consul, formally ended the rift between France and the papacy by restoring the old episcopate and recognizing its power to appoint and control the lower clergy and exercise an unhindered spiritual authority over French Catholics and much of primary education.

Contemporary Interpretations

Thus, both the “new social interpretation” and the sociocultural approach enrich our understanding of the Revolution’s social background without identifying any single dramatic factor that can be highlighted. A basket of gradual and relatively minor economic, social, and cultural factors, such as those identified by the new socioeconomic and sociocultural methods, certainly provides valuable background but cannot explain why French society, politics, and institutions came to be transformed suddenly and dramatically in every way, why all precedent and tradition were systematically uprooted. Far more exceptional and specific factors *must* be adduced to account for the overthrow of this vast edifice of conservative thought, practice, and *ancien régime* institutions. Between 1788 and 1820, the most common explanation of the French Revolution both in France and outside was, overwhelmingly, that it originated in “philosophy.” Contemporaries recognized that discontent and social frustration fueled the unrest once the body politic was plunged into turmoil and instability, helping make the Revolution possible, but also clearly understood that social tensions by no means determined its character, course, and outcome. The people’s exasperation merely helped *l'esprit philosophique*, as Jacques Necker (1732–1804), Louis XVI’s chief minister in 1789, called it, to assume command of the discontent and convert it to its own purposes. This was the general view, so commonplace in fact that its cultural implications urgently need to be explored. The question is: Was this assumption prevailing throughout the revolutionary era actually correct?²¹

Not only did radically new concepts “capture” the unrest, but from the summer of 1788, *l'esprit philosophique*, held Necker, daily extended its conquests, exploiting old grievances and causing “all the insurrections against received ideas and commonly accepted truths.” The institutions and laws that had previously been accepted by practically everyone came to be challenged, scorned, and overthrown, not by the people or France’s elites but by an unrepresentative fringe. During the decades preceding the Revolution, explained Necker—who despite exalting “virtue” and wanting to help mold a happier and better society had also earlier attacked *l'esprit philosophique* in his book *De l'importance des opinions religieuses* (1788)—*l'esprit philosophique* first corrupted all sense of duty by assailing religion and then broke all constraints by wrongly reworking the principles of morality and politics, substituting an exaggerated notion of liberty for the wisdom of limits

and fomenting the confusion spread by the idea of “equality” in place of the traditional hierarchical conception of society headed by aristocracy, which obliterated the “prudentes gradations” composing the social order.²²

Admittedly, strikingly few philosophes or enlighteners figured in the Estates-General of 1789. Most committed “Enlightenment” candidates in the 1789 elections were unable to get elected. Condorcet, soon among the foremost architects of the Revolution, failed to be elected as a deputy.²³ Sieyès only just scraped in. The Royal Academy astronomer Jean-Sylvain Bailly (1736–93) was elected, but his election was highly exceptional, he explained, since “a great disfavor [prevailed] in the electoral assembly for the men of letters and *académiciens*.” Though more esprit philosophique would have helped the Estates, in Bailly’s opinion, most of the college of electors, being merchants and lawyers, displayed a marked antipathy to philosophes. (Condorcet was almost as suspicious of the lawyers and merchants as he was of the nobility.) At Lyon, too, records one of the Revolution’s great personalities, Mme. Roland, the “commercially minded” showed great aversion to philosophy and those ardent for the Revolution. Only about ten members out of the twelve hundred Estates-General deputies of 1789 could be described, like Mirabeau and Sieyès, as philosophes in the Enlightenment sense. But this acute paucity of intellectuals in the Estates of 1789 makes it all the more extraordinary and astounding that precisely this group, both inside and outside the Estates, could so swiftly come to dominate the revolutionary leadership in the National Assembly and its guiding committees, as well as (initially) the Paris municipality and practically all of the influential pro-Revolution papers.²⁴

“Before it was made into law,” affirmed Pierre-Louis Roederer (1754–1835), a prominent revolutionary leader from Lorraine, the “Revolution was made in men’s minds and habits.”²⁵ How and why? Because the great revolutionary principles and enactments—abolition of aristocracy and eventually the use of all aristocratic titles, equality before the law, democracy, press freedom, equality of all cults and their separation from the state, the Rights of Man (1789), civil divorce (1792), the suppression of monarchy (1792), and the abolition of slavery (1794)—were all manifestly saturated in Enlightenment language, debates, and philosophical categories. A “revolution of ideas” was necessary before there could be a revolution of fact, agreed Dominique Joseph Garat (1749–1833), a revolutionary leader from the southwest, and did actually occur from the 1740s down to 1789. It paved

the way for the “revolution of events” and was its motor and shaping force.²⁶

Like virtually all major participants, Camille Desmoulins (1760–94), son of a Picard local official and one of Danton’s closest advisers, held that “the people” certainly played a large part but needed to be led, identifying “ce siècle de lumières” (this century of Enlightenment)—the “most beautiful monument that philosophy and patriotism had bequeathed to humanity”—as the Revolution’s true inspiration. “Philosophy,” he believed, was the chief agent of the Revolution.²⁷ In the years immediately before the Revolution, discerning observers stressed, the general intellectual context was dramatically transformed by a torrent of new philosophy. Often the particular revolutionary ideas disseminated on the eve of 1788 seemed too familiar and too obvious to require detailed explanation. “Today with Rousseau, Price, Helvétius ‘entre les mains de tout le monde’ [in everyone’s hands],” commented Brissot in 1786, there was no longer any need to explain to readers the main themes of their writings.²⁸

Of course, the vast majority had not read any philosophes and were hardly equipped to do so. But most people participating in the great mass movements of the Revolution were less the agent of revolution, suggested Desmoulins, than the Revolution’s prime obstacle. In his seminal pamphlet *La France libre* (1789), he claims that the nobility and clergy held their dominant position in pre-1789 French ancien régime society not because they had forcibly conquered this right and appropriated their privileges but because the ancien régime social order had long endured with the “consent” of the vast majority.²⁹ He and the rest of the democratic revolutionary leadership of 1788–89, like the radical philosophes earlier, considered this broad, popular acquiescence a gigantic edifice of ignorance and superstition, an obstruction to be cleared away as fast as possible. Opponents of the Revolution, and nearly all merchants, lawyers, and other professionals, abhorred Desmoulins’s irreverent republican standpoint. Yet, strikingly, whatever their views, nearly everyone agreed that *la philosophie* was the principal factor undermining the foundations of French society and the legitimacy of its moral code and religion, and shaping the new order. The people had been on the right path before, held those opposing the Revolution, but in their simplicity were now disastrously misled by a handful of republican militants like Desmoulins, inspired by *la philosophie*.

Virtually all highly educated observers identified the Revolution’s chief cause as *cette grande révolution morale* (this great moral revolu-

tion), as it was called by Pierre-Louis Ginguené (1748–1816), an ardent Rousseauist republican imprisoned during the Terror.³⁰ Father Claude Fauchet (1744–93), among those most eager to combine revolutionary ideology with Catholicism (until guillotined in 1793), considered France in the 1780s to be split between two vast cultural forces—solid tradition and religion on one side (the France of the great majority) and *la philosophie* on the other. In his view, France in 1789 really comprised two nations: those bending to ecclesiastical authority and the confessional and those inspired by the *Encyclopédie*. One side admired political economy and Rousseau's *Social Contract*, the other monarchy, bishops, and consecrated authority. This both caused and shaped the Revolution. Fauchet did his best to rise above this division, rebuking both sides. A sincere Catholic of a most unusual kind, he believed that religion teaches men the deepest truths. It was divine Providence that brought the French people to the threshold of liberty in 1788. But Christians must accept, he added, that Christianity does not demonstrate the correct way to organize society and politics in accordance with liberty, equality, and truth. Providence prepared the ground but “philosophy was the actual instrument of Providence in bringing about this marvel” that “filled our minds with ideas of liberty, inflamed hearts and enlivened courage.”³¹

Among the best-known antiphilosophe, the ex-Jesuit Luxembourgeois, François-Xavier de Feller (1735–1802), dubbed this world conspiracy, as he saw it, “l'empire du philosophisme.” *Philosophisme*, he explained, was a mighty construct begun in the 1740s by a group of extraordinary writers who managed to impress sections of all classes with their wit and sarcasm, devising a whole new language and way of thinking, and by cunning dexterity and obscure use of terms made their ruinous ideas seem “sublime” to many. The “conspiracy” commenced with Diderot, who turned the *Encyclopédie* into an engine of subversion and impiety. All the chief conspirators were, like Diderot and d'Alembert, atheistic “parasites” who lounged in cafés, insinuating, flattering, and mocking their way to domination of the salons and academies, and who eventually conquered positions of great power. Among their chief weapons, suggested Feller, was their appeal to women, especially young, pretty women susceptible to fine phrases, elegant turns of speech, witticisms, and subtle and less-than-subtle erotic suggestion.³²

But the claim that *philosophisme* as such caused the Revolution remains too vague to serve as a useful explanatory tool. The *philosophie* that most writers, including the Counter-Enlightenment antiphilosophe,

considered the Revolution's prime cause embraced virtually the entire Enlightenment. But ascribing the Revolution to an undifferentiated *philosophie moderne* undermined their case by being too sweeping and too general. They failed to focus on the particular current embodying the main revolutionary tendency. This was pointed out by various contemporary observers, often political and Enlightenment moderates like the young revolutionary leader Antoine-Pierre-Joseph-Marie Barnave (1761–93) and the celebrated legal reformer Jean-Étienne Portalis (1745–1807). *L'esprit philosophique* was the Revolution's principal cause, agreed Barnave and Portalis, but it was not Enlightenment philosophy generally, only a certain kind of philosophy, that was responsible. The real agent was the radical current that rejected Locke and Montesquieu, which was promoted by Denis Diderot (1713–84), Claude-Adrien Helvétius (1715–71), and Paul-Henri-Thiry, Baron d'Holbach (1723–89).³³ Portalis, like the journalist Jacques Mallet du Pan (1749–1800), believed thoroughgoing legal and penal reform in Europe could have been accomplished by the moderate Enlightenment, by kings and courts, without any revolution and without adopting the radical systems Mallet dubbed *la philosophie de Paris*, which they all deemed the root of the Revolution.³⁴

Exactly this same insistence on the need to distinguish between moderate and materialist-revolutionary philosophy recurs in another well-known late eighteenth-century writer, Jean-François de La Harpe (1739–1803). La Harpe first ardently supported and then later, after the Terror, equally fervently repudiated the Revolution. What exactly is the philosophy that caused the Revolution, asked La Harpe in 1797? A Parisian-born foundling of unknown parentage and recognized philosophe in his own right, La Harpe's perspective is of particular relevance here. Applauded by Portalis among others for disavowing the Revolution and the philosophy that caused it,³⁵ La Harpe, originally a disciple of Voltaire, had known several leading philosophes personally. His principal work rejecting philosophique and Revolution principles, the two-volume *Philosophie du Dix-Huitième Siècle*, was mostly composed in 1797 while the Revolution was still in full swing. Voltaire, he argued, was the first to emancipate the human mind and render philosophique reason popular with readers. But Voltaire was marginal in terms of the philosophy that caused the Revolution. It is in his long chapter on Diderot that La Harpe chiefly develops his critique of the *secte philosophique*. Here he sought to uncover the intellectual and psychological

causes of what he, like the apologists he had once combated, now considered a revolutionary catastrophe.

Primarily responsible, argued La Harpe, were those propagating the doctrines of Diderot, including in one crucial respect Rousseau. For despite the great quarrel that shattered their former friendship, from 1757, the two great thinkers nurtured one particularly subversive political doctrine that Rousseau derived from Diderot, namely, that all the ills and crimes of the world arise not from innate defects of human nature (which both saw as fundamentally good) but from the “radical viciousness” Diderot was the first to see in all existing institutions, systems of government, morality, and society. This was a truly monstrous tenet, held La Harpe after 1794, an absurdity, destroying “all social order among all nations.” It stemmed not just from the implacable aversion to all existing authority common to Diderot and Rousseau but also from their fervent conviction that their insights supplied a basis for giving the world an entirely new set of moral rules and laws. There is a direct line, contended La Harpe, connecting Diderot to the Revolution’s most socially uncompromising initiatives, including the conspiracy of Babeuf and his followers, crushed by the Directory in 1797.³⁶

These two fundamentally opposing tendencies within the Enlightenment, one accepting and the other rejecting the prevailing social and political order, must be the essential starting-point for any valid account of the Revolution. The revolutionary philosophical tendency, acknowledged political leaders belonging to the *parti de philosophie* like Mirabeau, Sieyès, Brissot, Condorcet, Volney, Ginguené, Roederer, and Desmoulins, had absorbed the contributions of many different writers—d’Argenson, Voltaire, Montesquieu, Mably, Diderot, Rousseau, Helvétius, d’Holbach, and Raynal. Brissot also deeply admired the subversive roles of Bayle and Boulanger. Revolutionary leaders construing the Revolution as they did often commented on the various contributions. Thus, Voltaire mattered chiefly for his peerless literary skill and relentless ridiculing of old, established prejudices, for the rest being a friend of kings and aristocrats. Brissot was especially caustic about Voltaire, whom he rightly judged no friend of the people.³⁷ Montesquieu seasoned the collective philosophical recipe with “salt and energy,” commented Roederer; but this great man, being “unfortunate enough” to be a nobleman and *parlementaire* himself, also fell into *des erreurs* regarding social status and “corporations.”³⁸ Rousseau taught readers to think about “les droits des hommes” (the rights of man). A key role in

the 1770s and 1780s was afterward widely and correctly ascribed to the subversive group referred to collectively as Raynal, who, unlike the others, directly attacked social oppression and tyranny “armé d'une plume de fer” (armed with a fiery pen).³⁹ Many also warmly praised Mably's contribution.

Most of the Enlightenment in France and Europe generally was moderate and therefore, in La Harpe's opinion in 1797, good. Only a fringe was sweepingly subversive religiously and politically. Whereas Fontenelle, Montesquieu, Buffon, d'Alembert, and Condillac were true philosophers deservedly exonerated of responsibility for the great catastrophe that engulfed France and Europe, those responsible were the “false philosophers and *sophistes*,” the worst, in his opinion, being Diderot, Raynal, Rousseau, Voltaire, and Helvétius. These were the Revolution's true “artisans,” the “first and most powerful movers of the frightful *bouleversement*. ”⁴⁰ To Helvétius, whose materialism had, in his view, attracted attention for all the wrong reasons, he dedicated a separate refutation. La Harpe, like Portalis, saw la philosophie moderne as a complex, cumulative corpus of ideas and attitudes reaching back many decades, gradually distilling within itself all the *extravagances* of which the human mind is capable: “By a necessary consequence, the revolution that [subversive philosophy] has caused in our century nurtured all the crimes and ills to which the human species is susceptible.”⁴¹

Whereas the Revolution's supporters conceived la philosophie moderne as the path to universal emancipation and happiness, after 1794 La Harpe located the secte philosophique's revolutionary potential in its having evolved under oppression into an effective bandwagon for attracting all the vain, grudging, and resentful spirits opposing the existing order. Radical Enlightenment, he recognized, was not just the intellectual cauldron of the Revolution but, equally, its principal social and cultural factor, for it was primarily this package of interlinked concepts that channeled, organized, armed, and mobilized the great mass of endemic, long-standing, popular disgruntlement, frustration, resentment, and ambition.⁴²

What was Rousseau's role in this revolution of the mind? On the one hand, he was the ubiquitous inspirer of the age. As one perceptive author put it, “every party of the Revolution made some claim on the heritage of Rousseau.”⁴³ An immense variety of participants of varying stripes adored Rousseau, from the celebrated court portraitist Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun (who detested the Revolution) and Fauchet the Catholic revolutionary to Robespierre and Saint-Just, the men who wrecked

the Revolution of 1788–93. Rousseau was the surpassing hero simultaneously of the Left and Right, a status no other ideologue ever achieved. Nevertheless, major leaders of the Revolution prior to 1793 remained mostly rather guarded and critical in their assessments of his admittedly massive contribution and some, like Condorcet, barely referred to Rousseau at all. Shortly after the Bastille’s fall in July 1789, Mirabeau, who like most radical revolutionaries disparaged Montesquieu in his paper, the *Courrier de Provence*, exalted Rousseau for his central role in preparing the Revolution: never should one speak of liberty and the Revolution without paying homage to this immortal “*vengeur de la nature humaine*.⁴⁴ Among Rousseau’s “truths” pronounced truly philosophique by Mirabeau was his doctrine that the social system benefits men only if they all own something and no one possesses too much, a notion dear to Fauchet and many revolutionaries.⁴⁵ Yet, there was also a continuous tension between the Rousseauist claim that men should be primarily guided by moral instinct and “feeling,” “le sens moral,” and the Radical Enlightenment’s allegiance to “reason” alone.⁴⁶

Furthermore, the democratic republicans who made the Revolution of 1789–93, or as Mme. Roland expressed it, the “wise men” showing the people the way who “helped them recover their rights” until pushed aside by more ambitious characters who “flatter and delude the people and turn them against their true defenders,” objected to major strands of Rousseau’s political thought. It was impossible for the republican democrats to embrace Rousseau’s stern strictures regarding “representation,” his claim that “sovereignty cannot be represented,” and extremely difficult to accept his view that republics can be viable only in small countries, that popular piety should be respected (not attacked), and that a measure of book censorship is needed. Very many, like Brissot, disliked Rousseau’s aversion to cosmopolitanism, universalism, and the pursuit of universal peace, and like d’Holbach especially despised his veneration of the Spartan martial spirit and the narrow chauvinism his thought appeared to encourage.⁴⁷

This friction between the cosmopolitanism of the parti de philosophie, later taken to its furthest extreme by ideologues like Gorani, Proly, and Cloots, and the narrow patriotism and xenophobia of Robespierre, Saint-Just, and their populist faction, lay at the root of the ceaseless battle waged unremittingly within the Jacobins and throughout the Revolution between the Revolution of Reason and the Revolution of the Will, a tension that needs to be emphasized more than it has been by historians. The uncompromising antilibertarianism, anti-intellectualism, and

chauvinism of Robespierre's Revolution justified itself in large part by appealing to emotional, sentimental aspects of Rousseau, whereas opposing Robespierre's ideology inevitably meant questioning much of Rousseau from the critical perspectives of Diderot, d'Holbach, Helvétius, Naigeon, and Condorcet.⁴⁸ Hostility to the *secte philosophique* during Robespierre's ascendancy intensified, together with rejection of atheism as unpatriotic and contrary to virtue and the ordinary.⁴⁹ The institutionalized Rousseauism of the post-1793 (*Robespierriste*) Jacobins was the militant opposite of the Radical Enlightenment guardedly toward Rousseau of Mirabeau, Sieyès, Brissot, Cloots, Volney, Condorcet, and the revolutionary leadership of 1788–93 generally. Here was a clash between two antagonistic, ideological streams pervading the struggle for control of the Revolution's course and direction.

Robespierre identified "atheism" as a defining feature of the radical ideology, republican and democratic, of the *parti de philosophie* that he overwhelmed. But why did the question of atheism play such a pivotal role in the fight between the Revolution of Reason and the Revolution of the Will, as well as in the battle between Revolution and Counter-Enlightenment? In 1789, after all, the vast majority everywhere in the Western world regarded atheism as "madness," as Desmoulins expressed it, believing it obvious the cosmos was created by God. But what chiefly distinguished the democratic *philosophique* standpoint from how most men thought, explained Desmoulins, was not their questioning God's existence as such, or the issue of whether or not God created the world, but rather the question of whether and how, if divine Providence exists, it governs the world. The real issue segregating most of society, including Robespierre, from the *parti de philosophie* that made the Revolution of 1788–93 was whether God is an authority to whom men can appeal. For God offers no sign. He does not show himself. It is in vain, held Desmoulins, that men ask which cult is the most pleasing to him; his natural power revealed in earthquakes, floods, and other calamities wrecks churches no less than mosques or synagogues. Since he manifests the most perfect indifference to which religion men choose and his providence does nothing for Christians or Muslims in preference to others, why not, asked Desmoulins, replace the "dismal" cult the French revered for so many centuries, a faith supportive of the Inquisition, kings, monks, and self-mortification, with a religion of joy, like that of the ancient Greeks, a cult friendly to pleasure, women, and liberty?⁵⁰

Morally and politically, it was urgent that the French should make this substitution, for “the most devout of our kings were the worst.” Mirabeau and other philosophes, contended Desmoulins, had wholly disproved claims that monarchical government is the best form of government. Louis XIV was certainly venerated by a horde of flatterers, but in the “eyes of reason” he was a despot, contemptible egoist, bad parent, and abysmal friend and husband. Cruel and vindictive, this “Jesuit king” who loved war was an insane persecutor who used his dragoons forcibly to convert millions of “heretics.” To combat tyranny one must combat religious authority together with all conventional notions. If the nobility and clergy resisted the critiques and attacks on monarchy, faith, and hereditary privilege, the rest of society did too. The Revolution had to fight them all.⁵¹

In 1789, Desmoulins justified imposing Revolution principles on a largely uncomprehending and partly unwilling people, and remaking France’s institutions and laws, repudiating all previously accepted laws, on the grounds of *la volonté générale* (the general will). This was a principle locating sovereignty in the people as a whole, defined by what best serves the majority according to “reason” and what people would want if prejudices did not prevent them from actually wanting it,⁵² a new principle in political thought devised by a specific group of philosophes beginning in France with Diderot and his circle in the 1740s. These were the thinkers who were rejecting modérantisme, relativism, traditionalism, and enthusiasm for the British model, taught by Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Hume. Society was not created for the misery of the majority or happiness of the few, typically asserts the tract *Vérités philosophiques et patriotiques* (late 1788) by the Norman lawyer Jacques Guillaume Thouret (1746–94); rather, everyone’s will is subject to the volonté générale, the common will working for each individual’s happiness subsumed within that of all in general.

Deriving from a complex interplay reaching back, underground, over many decades, volonté générale, originally introduced by Diderot, had been vigorously adopted in his sense by d’Holbach, Helvétius, Condorcet, and Volney but adapted to mean something rather different by Rousseau.⁵³ Intimately entwined with the greatest innovation in political thought of the eighteenth century—the doctrine that sovereignty lies in the people—the term is mostly used in early Revolution debates in its more general, non-Rousseauist sense. Thus, the pending Estates-General, proclaimed Thouret (one of the few lawyers among the revolutionary

leadership), must be an assembly based on the volonté générale, meaning the needs and desires of the whole nation with every individual's interest being treated equally. Neither God nor the Church nor any prophet or tradition decreed this. It is stipulated rather by that "eternal reason that regulates the universe," an "eternal reason" that predicted the coming *révolution*.⁵⁴ Sieyès, among the Revolution's chief promoters of the doctrine of volonté générale, was especially unsympathetic to Rousseau's inflexion of the concept, most obviously in his views on representation and direct democracy.⁵⁵

Hence, the democratic republican publicists of 1788–93 were summarizers, not innovators. It was not his purpose to say anything new, explained Desmoulins in *La France libre*. An ardent disciple of Rousseau as a young man, Desmoulins, like most key revolutionary leaders, became more critical later. His aim was to expand on the useful things already demonstrated, fanning a fire "happily relit by the flame of philosophy." And what exactly had *la philosophie* demonstrated? It had proved, averred Desmoulins, that the nobility are the worst of pests, that all the laws of every country needed rewriting, that the monarchical is not the best but the worst form of government, that monks are useless, and that religion is in need of fundamental reform.⁵⁶ Kings had turned France into a land of despotism, but even the most downtrodden people produce a few republican-minded souls for whom love of liberty outweighs all existing institutions. Despite the ignorance and prejudice inculcated by religion, "the lies of orators and poets," the eternal eulogies of kingship pronounced by priests, publicists, and "all our books," by 1788 he himself burned with republican ardor impelling him toward liberty. What society needed was not just a republic but a democratic republic: "je me déclare donc hautement pour la démocratie."⁵⁷ By displaying ingenuity and constancy in his writings, agreed the long-standing republican Brissot in 1782, the philosophe can conquer "*l'opinion publique*," and "*l'opinion publique*" would before long "prove stronger than kings and command the entire universe." The true *esprit philosophique*, he asserted in 1782, "necessarily brings also *l'esprit républicain*".⁵⁸

Most Frenchmen during the early Revolution assuredly had little thought of rejecting monarchy or embracing revolution. But the "radical" wing of the revolutionary leadership—in sharp contrast to Robespierre and his allies—was already uncompromisingly republican by 1788. To Desmoulins, fighting "error" and "slavery" with philosophy meant replacing the existing legal framework with enlightened laws

and an Enlightenment morality, the true sources, as he saw it, of man's future happiness and prosperity. In another early revolutionary democratic pamphlet, *Réflexions d'un philosophe Breton*, of 20 December 1788, by a minor noble and former mayor of Quimper, Augustin Le Goazre de Kervélégan (1748–1825), the "philosopher" summons the Bretons to recover "their rights" by shattering the "humiliating chains" of slavery, whereby nobility and clergy had always oppressed the Third Estate. These "rapacious" orders are here denounced by philosophy, not for overstepping precedent or infringing some privilege but for appropriating "all the advantages of society" for themselves.⁵⁹

Such views explain the highly exceptional cultural and political character of the Revolution—its undeviating resolve to set aside all existing precedents and models. To the revolutionary leadership reorganizing the body politic and society more broadly, there were no grounds for consulting, much less emulating, any earlier or still existing model. "We shall surpass these English," affirmed Kervélégan, "who are so proud of their constitution and so used to insulting our abasement." In fact, the French would eradicate all hereditary nobility, venality of office, purchasing of noble titles for money, hereditary privilege, monopolies, arbitrary arrests, seigneurial jurisdiction, and illicit decrees. There would be no more Richelieus or Catherine de Medicis. The revolutionaries would establish liberty of commerce, liberty of conscience, liberty to write, liberty of expression. The Revolution would extinguish the parlements with their decrees, prohibitions, and lording it over the public. Once the Revolution gathered momentum, the parlementaire elite of France would perish, its influence and very name eradicated. France's laws would henceforth be identical for everyone and the system of police spies and secret reports abolished.⁶⁰ The Bastille will be raised to the ground, predicted Kervélégan, and a "National Assembly" put in its place, a "temple of liberty" subordinate to the nation and stripped of all hereditary trappings, that in the future would remain permanently in session and decide all questions of peace and war. Desmoulins, echoing Mirabeau, envisaged completely transforming the magistracy, priesthood, army, and state finances on principles national in character and destined solely for national purposes.⁶¹ Moreover, this Revolution about to begin, admonished Desmoulins in 1789, would unquestionably succeed. "Sublime effet de la philosophie," no power on earth, he predicted (wrongly), could resist the revolution that had won the minds of those, like himself, eager to lead the people. To him, la philosophie had accomplished its task. The most crucial part of the revolution was effectively

over. Even before anything had yet been formalized or accomplished, there was already a vital sense in which “la France est libre.”⁶²

By 1788, emerging Third Estate leaders already proclaimed equality the overriding moral and legal principle in legitimately determining relations among men. To them, the Crown was irrelevant, the clergy’s authority usurped, and nobility illicit. Their plans were molded not by social class or experience, nor profession or economic interest, but a comprehensive, interlocking system of principles rooted in *la philosophie*, which, according to Mirabeau, Sieyès, Volney, Condorcet, and Brissot, was solidly anchored in empiricism and science.⁶³ By 1788, this republican and near-republican core had long rejected the division of a future national assembly into three orders—nobility, clergy, and Third Estate—along with everything Montesquieu recommended concerning division of powers and emulating Britain. They were uniformly disdainful of “institutions aristocratiques.”⁶⁴ Society would be reordered on the basis of equality. All men should enjoy the same “rights.” The law should be remade on the basis of *philosophique* principles because “reason” and equity are the sole criteria of moral and social legitimacy.

To them, equality was the key to establishing basic human rights and reconstituting politics, institutions, social relations, marriage, education, and the law on their proper basis. For the Revolution’s innumerable opponents, by contrast, whether Counter-Enlightenment ideologues or “moderate” enlighteners, equality was an artificial and illicit concept. Opponents viewed their doctrine as derived from a false philosophy rooted in irreligion, fanaticism, and Freemasonry, or, as Burke, Gibbon, and Portalis preferred, in unwisely adopted “abstract propositions.”⁶⁵ What made it necessary to proclaim the Rights of Man, harnessing the power of the state to the principle of human rights, held Roederer, was inequality of means and wealth in society. Unless one accepts government by vested interests at the expense of the weak that oppresses the majority and enriches the strong, government must intervene to help the deprived, watch over the whole citizenry, and guarantee to all “le plenitude de leurs droits” (plenitude of their rights).⁶⁶ Only in light of the “revolution that occurred before 1789”—the “revolution in concepts”—does it emerge clearly why the Revolution was not just a political but also a “financial, military, civil, moral and religious revolution.”⁶⁷

The Paris librarian and bookbinder Louis-Marie Prudhomme (1752–1830) expressly set out with his illustrated Sunday paper, the *Révolutions de Paris*, launched in July 1789, to forge a new society based

on a “Declaration of the Rights of Man,” guided principally by “la philosophie.”⁶⁸ While oppression was ubiquitous and the ultimate cause of all revolutions, nowhere had there been any real revolution prior to 1788, held Prudhomme. Such a revolution requires “les lumières de la raison,” la philosophie moderne, to forge the awareness, analysis, plans, media, knowledge, and conditions without which real revolution in the new sense, disseminated by the *philosophes-révolutionnaires*, is not possible. Doubtless, some peoples, like the Dutch and English, partially recovered “their rights” through revolt “before the reign of philosophy.” But this Prudhomme deemed sustainable only in a hesitant, vengeful, and incomplete manner, where not guided by “la pacifique opération de la philosophie.” The more philosophy guides, the less violent and more complete the revolution will be. It is earnestly to be hoped, he added, that la philosophie will overawe passion, hatred, and resentment during the revolution now commencing.⁶⁹ Here, Prudhomme, Desmoulins, Kervélégan, La Harpe, and many others were to be gravely disappointed.

Authentic revolution of the kind these writers envisaged needs not only to be made but also consolidated. If philosophy alone enables men to understand the human condition sufficiently to accomplish genuine revolution, likewise philosophy alone can prevent men from immediately sliding back under slavery. Without philosophy mankind cannot devise adequate, well-designed constitutions or correctly formulate “les droits sacrés de l’humanité,” or counter the risk of rural disorder and “le despotisme du peuple.”⁷⁰ There is no such thing as a successful fight against credulity and religious bigotry, contended Prudhomme, not directed by la philosophie. “O mes concitoyens!,” urged his journal, “do not forget that ignorance is the mother of error”; banish ignorance and your liberty is safe.⁷¹ Here was an ideology bound to convert the clash between la philosophie and its foes into a long and bitter struggle.

Those Roederer termed “les disciples de la philosophie moderne” in the end failed to consolidate the revolution they forged and, for a time, from the summer of 1793 to late 1794, were ousted by the Montagnards, the populist bloc derisively given this name originally because they sat on the highest benches, on the Left, in the Assembly. According to this faction, the people’s will and common man’s sentiments were the Revolution’s sole legitimate guide. This interruption, especially the ten-month Terror (September 1793–July 1794), followed a prolonged power struggle. It produced a complete reordering of the Revolution’s basic values, in fact, the undoing of the Revolution. During these months, democracy, freedom of thought and expression, and the Rights

of Man were jettisoned, freedom of the press aborted, individual liberty annulled, and terror exalted. But this catastrophic upset and trampling of human rights proved relatively brief and was then largely reversed again between 1795 and 1799.

Nevertheless, this bloody aberration, relatively short-lived though it was, posed (and still poses) a question that from 1795, in turn, became an ideological battlefield. Was the Terror inherent in the revolutionary principles of 1789 and hence also the outcome of *la philosophie*? This was the undeviating claim of all antiphilosophes, ultraroyalists, constitutional monarchists, and disillusioned former revolutionaries like La Harpe. These were all eager to link *philosophisme*, republicanism, materialism, and atheism to moral perversity. But were they right to attribute the Terror to the *secte philosophique*? A thorough sifting of the evidence suggests that they were wrong. Many of the philosophes-révolutionnaires responsible for the revolution of 1788–93 were ruthlessly guillotined by Robespierre. The survivors adamantly denied that the Revolution had immolated itself. They explained the doctrine of Robespierre and his allies as the outcome of a completely different and antagonistic ideology. If Marxist accounts of the Revolution as the outcome of class struggle today look flawed, François Furet's widely respected thesis ascribing innate totalitarian leanings and an embedded latent illiberalism to the Revolution in its origins and basic principles needs rejecting just as comprehensively.

Among the strangest misconceptions plaguing accounts of the French Revolution nowadays is the still-predominant consensus that the “break between the Revolution and Christianity”—especially the Catholic Church—was “non-essential, contingent and explicable only in terms of the subsequent vicissitudes of the Revolution itself.” The break was supposedly not inherent in the context of 1789. In fact, all the evidence demonstrates the opposite. The impulse to (nonviolent) revolutionary de-Christianization was basic to the outlook of the *philosophique* leadership who made the Revolution before, as well as in, 1789.⁷² There are also other widely accepted, striking, and utterly unfounded myths. Among the revolutionary leadership “in the summer of 1789,” reaffirmed one leading scholar recently, “virtually no one challenged the principle of monarchy,” a statement for which he assumed it suffices to invoke the general consensus.⁷³ There is, indeed, a wide consensus among historians about this. But no close observer took this view at the time—quite the contrary. When Jean-Louis Carra (1742–93), among the principal National Convention deputies, Jacobin activ-

ists, and Parisian newspaper editors, remarked in a pamphlet of June 1793 that he was a “republican” who had roundly rejected monarchy in 1789 and who had done so also long before 1789, he was merely echoing a standpoint not just widespread but general among the French revolutionary vanguard (but not, of course, Robespierre and the populist faction).⁷⁴ It would seem that historians’ prevailing consensus here once again rests on nothing more than the long-standing failure to give sufficient weight to the Revolution’s intellectual history and hence is likewise in urgent need of revision.

The Left revolutionary leadership in 1789 both rejected Christianity (whether from a deist or atheist-materialist standpoint) *and* as a bloc abjured the principle of monarchy, either wholly, like Carra, Brissot, and Desmoulins, or, as with Mirabeau and Sieyès, in the main. In 1789, Carra’s and Desmoulins’s republican stance was shared, we shall see, throughout the revolutionary democratic vanguard—by Condorcet, Kersaint, Dusaulx, Mandar, Lanthenas, Gorsas, Brissot, Pétion, Chamfort, Volney, Pierre-François Robert, Bonneville, Paine (who joined the French revolutionary leadership in the autumn of 1792), and the playwright Marie-Joseph Chénier. The philosophique revolutionary leadership as a group (unlike authoritarian populists such as Marat, Robespierre, Saint-Just, or Hébert) was overwhelmingly republican from the outset. In short, key general assumptions about the French Revolution, everywhere frequently repeated and long accepted by both philosophers and historians, turn out to be fundamentally incorrect, leaving us with an uncommonly urgent need for some very sweeping and drastic revision.